

High Ground: Windhover

by Obsidian Fourteen

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Summary: The spinoff of Obsidian Thirteen's fiction that he asked me to write since you guys kept asking what happened to Windhover. Hope you enjoy this as much as the original. Rating for language. May change rating to M. Chapter 5 uploaded.

## 1. Glimmer

High Ground: Windhover

A/N: Well, here I am again in the Halo section, but this time with something new. My good buddy Obsidian Thirteen asked me if I wanted to do a spinoff for High Ground and I of course agreed. He provided the setting, and I provided the character of Windhover, who is mentioned a couple times near the end of High Ground. So, I hope you enjoy.

Chapter One:

Glimmer

It was dark...very dark. And cold. Joseph Windhover subconsciously realized that it was dark because his eyes were closed. His senses began to come back to him; he could taste something metallic in his mouth. Blood. It had to be blood, he realized. Then, he realized something else; he hurt. Everywhere. Everything was sore from head to toe. He slowly sat up and opened his eyes. His visor was shattered and bits of it were probably embedded in his face. Now he remembered more; he was an ODST, a Helljumper. The baddest bunch of mother fuckers in the United Earth Space Corps. Joseph removed his helmet and slowly surveyed the area in front of him. To his right, a warthog lay on its side and, windshield broken to pieces and a man half crushed underneath the rear, his face contorted in a horrible display of agony. Joseph groggily pushed himself to his feet and started walking toward the wrecked vehicle one step at a time, struggling to keep his balance.

He approached the vehicle and got a better look at the poor crushed soul; he was handsome...young, too. Blonde hair, blue eyes, in good shape and a military uniform to boot. Windhover suddenly remembered who this man was; his name had been Derrik Montreal and they had escaped Jackson together...or tried, anyway. The Helljumper couldn't quite recall why they had been trying to escape, only that they had. He tried to push the vehicle back onto its wheels, but it was too heavy for just one man to move. After several futile minutes, he gave up and sat down beside the warthog. A stinging pain suddenly flared up on the right side of his face and a closer inspection of it with his hand revealed what he'd guessed earlier; fragments of his visor were indeed embedded there. Joseph began the painful task of removing the glass from his flesh and simply dropped it on the ground beside him.

Joseph stayed there a while, observing the night sky and the clouds in it as they lazily rolled overhead. He was trying to remember why he and Derrik were escaping Jackson. For what seemed like an eternity, he struggled to think, to remember, but just couldn't seem to summon any recollection of events past now and who he was. He quickly grew frustrated with his apparent ineptitude and slammed a gauntleted fist into the warthog's frame angrily, an action that resulted in a resounding 'whump' and loud screams of pain intermitted with curses in a half dozen languages. Something grabbed Windhover's attention in the distance and he immediately froze where he was. The pain was suddenly gone and his body was tense. There it was again! It sounded like a low, painful moan...almost sad. Joseph took no chances; he reached for anything he might be able to use as a weapon and carefully circumvented the warthog's front side to the underbelly...and the sound disappeared.

For several tense minutes, Joseph stood there and waited, listening. His eyes scanned the grassy field before him and found nothing; the only sounds his ears could hear were the sound of the wind softly blowing. He started around the back of the warthog and heard something that made him cringe. It was a wet smacking sound coming from the other side. There was suddenly a pungent smell in the air that reminded Joseph of a rotting corpse...but Derrik's body couldn't be that old. Could it? He cautiously peered around the warthog and saw something that nearly made him sick. There was a man hunched over Derek's torso, which was shaking slightly on the ground, and it looked as though...no, there was no way that was happening. Joseph stepped around the warthog clutching a rather large piece of his visor in his right hand.

"Who the fuck are you?"

The other didn't answer. It appeared as though the newcomer had siezed up from fear, but that was not the case. Joseph took a step back as the other man turned, realizing that there were chunks of flesh hanging from this person's mouth. Blood soaked the man's shirt and his eyes lazily stared in the ODS's direction. His hands reached out for Joseph as he stood, shambling toward his intended prey unnaturally. Joseph panicked and backpedalled, just trying to get away from the lunatic that was attacking him. He stumbled and shouted as the other man fell atop him and moaned loudly, lowering his head to try and rend the flesh from Joseph's body. In one swift movement, Joseph slammed the piece of broken visor into the man's head and leaped up after rolling his attacker off of his chest. The man lay there on the ground, convulsing as though he were having a

seizure...then stopped. Joseph watched in morbid fascination, panting for air. What in the world had just happened? He shook his head and looked back toward Derrick's body...and sorely wished he hadn't. His former companion's innards were laying on the ground beside his half-eaten corpse. Joseph felt his stomach turn and he vomited in disgust. After that, the ODS quickly set about trying to find some way to dig a hole. Luckily, there was an entrenching tool in the warthog. A few minutes later, there was a hole in the ground and a pile of dirt atop Derrick's corpse.

Joseph now remembered why he was where he was; they were trying to escape these things that had overrun Jackson City. It now seemed that their escape had failed for some reason and now Derrick was dead and Joseph had no means of transportation. Other than his own two legs, of course. Resigned to his fate, Joseph sat down in the driver's side of the warthog and ran a hand through his short hair, trying to remember who exactly he was. Joseph Windhover, Gunnery Sergeant, UNSC ID 22-315-0691. He sighed, growing tired of just sitting here and doing nothing. Joseph was about to abandon the wrecked vehicle when he heard voices on the radio. Voices! People! He rushed to grab the transmitter, fumbled with it for a few seconds, then quued the radio.

"Hello? Is anyone out there? Please respond, over." For a tense moment, there was no reply; had he missed his chance? Then, one of the voices he'd heard before came back on the radio.

"This is Sergeant Scott Wood, who's this?" The man sounded like hell...though Joseph was sure he sounded the same way.

"Jesus Christ, I'm glad to hear another goddamned voice. My name is Joseph Windhover...and rank doesn't seem too important nowadays; does it Sarge?" he laughed cynically as he spoke.

"Know what you mean." came the reply. "What's your location, soldier?"

Joseph stood and quickly glanced around for some way to get his bearings. He spotted a road sign. "Uh, about ten miles outside of Jackson. I just flipped my Goddamn warthog. Where are you?"

"At a base called Outpost 31. We're probably not too far away from each other; we came out from that city a few days ago."

"Are you shitting me? Christ, I can't believe that. Which way from the city?" Joseph couldn't believe his rotten luck...could Derrik have survived if they'd met up with this Sergeant Wood and the others that were probably there with him? Joseph pushed that thought aside; now was not the time to be thinking about the 'what ifs'.

"North."

As if that were a code word, memories from the past few days came flooding back; he remembered everything now. Including most of the city's former residents slowly moving north. That was how he and Derrik had escaped that hellhole.

"Goddamn, I think you guys might have company soon. About a day and a half ago, I saw a pretty large force of those things heading north. I

don't know if they know you're there, but you should keep your eyes peeled. Gunny Windhover out."

Sergeant wood came back with the standard reply, to which Windhover paid no mind. He began looking for weapons and found a sniper rifle that had belonged to him, as well as a pistol and some ammo for both. windhover slipped the ammo and pistol in their respective places and searched for a weapon that had a little more in-between range than the ones he was carrying. Another search earned him the battle rifle that had belonged to Derrick and what ammo the other man had been carrying. Joseph then set to work on trying to get the radio out of the warthog to carry with him and succeeded. Then he began the long trek to Outpost 31, hoping he could make it there and join with the rest of the survivors.

## 2. Origins

High Ground: Windhover

A/N: Well, I got a pretty good response there. I'm glad you guys seem to be enjoying this as much as Obsidian "Dante" Thirteen's original. Hope you enjoy chapter two.

Chapter Two:

### Origins

Joseph smiled and shook his head as he ran along the side of a relatively unused path; he and Sergeant Wood had been talking for the better half of ten or fifteen minutes now, just bullshitting about past glories and adventures, women they'd hooked up with and so on. The night seemed to have grown darker somehow as he neared the outpost as though nature herself were trying to warn Windhover of a coming danger. It seemed as though he had been running for miles, and that was probably close to the truth; Joseph's feet ached and his legs burned from their use and he knew he was nearing the limits of his abilities...but was still so far out. Frustrated with his own abilities, Joseph climbed a nearby tree and took a break. He radioed Sergeant Wood to update the other man of his situation. The gruff voice on the other side replied with a gruff 'alright' and they began talking again. It wasn't long before Wood asked Gunny Windhover what his story was. He replied that it was a long story, but Wood wouldn't hear it; he wanted to know. So, Joseph launched into his tale.

Three days earlier. Jackson City.

It had begun as another boring day in Jackson, the capital city of the UNSC colony dubbed 'Cimmeria' for the Marines charged with defending the planet. Joseph had awoken to the sound of his alarm clock, gotten out of bed, showered and shaved. He remembered looking over himself in the mirror; tanned skin, high cheekbones, dark brown eyes and short black hair. Those features were common nowadays as humanity's genes mixed and dominant features such as darker skin rose above the others. Today was a rare off-day for the gunnery sergeant and he was going drinking with Corporal Montreal and Lieutenant Jones, two men from his platoon. Joseph left his apartment wearing his uniform and body armor and M6G which was required by the military higher ups in case the Covenant attacked the planet. The other two men were waiting outside in a warthog, blowing the horn rather

impatiently. Joseph sighed and gave the pair the finger before hurrying down the stairs and jumping in the passenger's seat. The Lieutenant always drove and Derrik was always standing at the turret. That's just how things went. They were headed for a local pub named O'Charley's that wasn't located too far away; it was on Main Street and they were on Fifth Street. Down the road a little ways and to the right was all the distance they needed to travel.

The three men disembarked their vehicle and headed inside, laughing and shoving and pushing like a group of teenagers. The pub itself was old-fashioned. The floors and tables and chairs were made of authentic oak from Earth, which must've cost a fortune to get here, and the bar served just about anything a thirsty Marine could possibly want to drink. All three men simply ordered beer and headed to their favorite spot; a table in the back corner of the bar next to the large window that looked out into the street.

"So, guys, check this out," said Jones, looking around the bar, "I hooked up with Captain Raymes the other night."

Derrik nearly spewed his beer all over the table and looked over at Jones. "No fucking way! Was she good?"

Jones nodded smugly and took an unnecessarily long swig of his beer, making Derrik wait before he got an answer. Joseph could see Derrik almost shaking from his impatience and it looked like his friend of many months was going to kill his Lieutenant of several weeks unless he spilled. After a couple seconds, Jones smacked his lips with an 'ah' and smiled at Montreal.

"Yeah, she was."

"I knew it!" exclaimed Corporal Montreal. "I fucking knew it! Didn't I tell you, Joey? Didn't I tell you?"

Joseph was laughing hysterically as the two marines continued their bullshitting, going all over the place from Raymes to other girls they'd slept with or wanted to sleep with to the Covenant to how badly they were kicking their asses and then back to Captain Raymes again while Joseph just sat and listened, shaking his head occasionally and taking a drink of his beer. This went on for several minutes until a woman's shriek from outside caught their attention. All three Helljumpers snapped their heads from the table and each other to outside; a man had pinned a woman to the ground and looked as though he were trying to rape her. Joseph reached for his sidearm and sprinted outside, giving the man a swift boot to the gut that caused him to roll off of the poor woman. At first, he only gave her a quick glance because she had stopped screaming...but looked again and saw something he would never forget; the woman's eyes were rolled back into her head and rather large chunks of her throat and upper torso were missing. Joseph heard Derrik and Jones cursing behind him and then heard someone vomit. His eyes, however, were locked on the offender who was struggling to push himself to his feet. Something about the whole situation just struck Joseph as odd; something felt wrong, other than the fact that this man had practically eaten a woman.

"You!" he shouted at the offender, bringing the M6G to bear on him. "What the hell is your deal?" Joseph heard safeties being flicked off behind him as the man turned in the Gunny's direction. He immediately

wished the man hadn't. The first thing that struck the three men was the man's physical condition; his clothes were torn and bloody with parts of his intestinal tract hanging from beneath the tattered fabric. His skin was ashen and pale, and coagulated blood dotted his face, but was mostly along his chin and jaw. Then came the smell...that terrible, awful smell that was so overpowering that Joseph's eyes watered and he heard someone vomit behind him again. The killer slowly stumbled forward, moaning eerily as he drew near Joseph. The closer he got, the louder the moans became. The Helljumper backpedalled slowly, his weapon trained on the man's forehead and he issued several warnings. After the third, he fired. The bullet slammed into the man's head, causing it to snap back violently and the back of his head exploded into a mist of blood and gore as the body limply crumpled to the ground in a heap. Jones spoke up next.

"Uh...uh, guys? Is...is it just me, or is she moving?"

Joseph and Derrik gave Jones a confused look, and he pointed to the woman's mutilated corpse that was stirring slowly. Her skin had taken the same color as the man that had attacked her and she looked as though she was dead...but...she was dead, wasn't she? Those wounds were mortal! There was no way she could have survived them. There was no blood flowing through her veins, otherwise it would have been flowing from her body. Joseph raised his magnum again as the woman rose, her eyes rolled back into her head and she began staggering toward the three men, moaning in the same fashion the her attacker had. Windhover was the first to realize what was going on and raised his weapon again with a shout of "fucking drop her!" In a flash, bullets were pelting the woman's reanimated flesh, but nothing seemed to be affecting her. Wounds that would have even killed a SPARTAN did nothing to even slow her down...so Jason repeated what he'd done to the man. He shot her in the forehead and she collapsed, never to rise again. No one spoke for several moments, their eyes transfixed upon the scene. They exchanged confused and frightened glances as Joseph nudged the now twice dead woman with his booted foot and nodded back to them, confirming that she was well and truly dead.

"What...what just happened here?" Derrik asked, glancing between Jones, Joseph and the two bodies and back again. "I mean...she was dead. Not moving...dead. There's no way anyone could survive the wounds she had. Or him! He should have been dead too!"

Lieutenant Jones shrugged; it was obvious that he was still in a state of shock as well. "I...I don't know. Maybe...no, that's stupid. It's impossible."

"What?" Derrik said.

"Well, maybe we're dealing...dealing with zombies here."

"Oh come on, El-Tee." said Joseph. "That's ridiculous."

"Well, think about it Gunny. He," said the Lieutenant gesturing toward the dead man, "attacked her. Bit her. Tried to eat her. She," he gestured to the dead brunette, "got back up and tried to take a chunk out of you. Besides, you saw the amount of damage we did; a headshot was the only thing that killed her!"

Joseph and Derrik glanced at each other for a moment, and slowly

nodded. "Well," Derrik began, "maybe this was an isolated event. Maybe...maybe we put an end to it." That hope was quickly dashed by a panicked voice on the 'Hog's radio.

"All personnell, return to base immediately! We have a riot in progress!"

### 3. Trigger Happy

High Ground: Windhover

A/N: Sorry for the delay, but my computer is apparently incredibly homosexual and likes to freeze when I try to save.

Chapter Three:

Trigger Happy

Joseph hung on to the divider that ran along the center of the Warthog for dear life; Lieutenant Jones was apparently a God with a warthog. He managed to make the vehicle do things and go places that Warthogs just weren't meant to. Mobs of the undead moaned and shambled their way through the very streets their Warthog was weaving through as Jones dodged abandoned vehicles and the larger groups of undead as Derrik fired into them wildly with the M41. .50 caliber rounds of screaming death tore into the various groups of zombies about, tearing off arms and legs and putting holes in them the size of watermelons, but none of that slowed the zombies down. Body parts and copious amounts of blood were everywhere...he suddenly realized it was the very little left of the poor souls unlucky enough to be caught by a large group of these creatures. The Warthog turned a corner and skidded to a stop. He heard Jones mutter something, but really didn't pay any attention; Joseph's eyes were drawn ahead of them toward their base. It was totally overrun by the undead. What had to be almost a thousand were outside, filing into the base.

"Oh my God..." Joseph muttered softly to himself. Jackson City Base was supposed to be impenetrable from a ground attack; it was surrounded on all sides by forty foot high, six foot thick titanium-reinforced concrete walls and only had one entrance. The large gate that served as the entrance and exit to the base was ten feet wide, ten feet tall and a foot and a half thick and made entirely of titanium-D alloy. Above that were guard posts with AIE-486H Heavy Machine Guns and sniper positions. Those had apparently not been enough to hold back the undead, who had somehow smashed their way through the gate. Windhover then realized the gravity of their situation. The base was screwed and royally so. The Lieutenant apparently agreed and gunned it past the horde, which Derrik fired at angrily as they passed. The three of them decided they would have to find a place to hole up, somewhere to hide. They abandoned the Hog on the corner of fifth and ninth streets and carefully headed up toward the Hulton Hotel. Derrik was a huge fan of zombie movies and was convinced that zombies couldn't climb stairs or use elevators...and the Hulton never had too many occupants and always had a large supply of food.

The hotel dominated the surrounding landscape, which was mostly small businesses with the occasional apartment complex. There was a grocery store called Willaims' nearby, in case they needed food, and a gun

store called Trigger Happy across the street from that. Windhover lead the way toward Trigger Happy and carefully peered inside the partially open door, looking for the owner or any occupants; the lights were on, thankfully, and he could see no one inside. Joseph carefully pushed inside to observe; much of the probably once clean marble floor was slick with fresh blood mixing with older blood, and he could see bits of bone and brain matter mixed in with it. A couple of the display cases were smashed, their contents empty, and bits of broken glass crunched under the trio's feet. Derrik closed the door behind them and locked it as Joseph checked behind the counter. All he could see were spent shell casings and bloody footprints. Joseph made his way toward the back of the shop behind the counter and tried the handle; it was locked. It was possible that survivors could be hiding in this building somewhere...or Zombies. Windhover knocked on the door as loudly as he could manage.

"Hello? Is anyone here? My name is Joseph Windhover. Hello?"

The three men waited, and even tried calling out a few more times with the same response. Windhover pressed his ear against the door and concentrated on the other room and was able to hear some faint scratching coming from the other side. He gulped inaudibly and stepped back from the door, raising his M6G. In one swift movement, he kicked the door just below the lock as hard as he could and it flung open, much to the apparent surprise to the zombie at the far end of the eight foot long hallway the door had revealed. It looked up at Windhover with a blank expression, then started toward them with a low moan. Joseph ended the poor soul's suffering with one round and then made his way toward the door that the creature had trying to gain access to. He heard whimpering coming from the other side and knocked on the door softly.

"Hello? Are you alright in there?"

"G-go-go away!" shrieked a female voice that shook with fear. "Go away!" she said again, her voice much calmer now.

"Hey, hey, calm down. My name is Joseph. I'm a Helljumper. I've got two other men here with me; we're here to help you."

For a minute, there was no response. Did she not believe him? He waited there while Jones and Montreal checked the stairs that were just to the left of the door he'd entered through. A soft click came from the door he stood in front of as the lock was undone, the knob turned and it opened slowly. Behind the door was a girl who couldn't have been more than nineteen years old. She looked terrified as she peered around the door and smiled softly when she realized that the man had been speaking the truth and that the undead hadn't somehow learned to lie. She nearly knocked Joseph down when she leapt from the closet she was hiding in and hugged him, crying into his chest. Though her voice was muffled by the fabric of his uniform, Joseph could hear her uttering 'thank you' over and over and over again, intermitted by her tearful sobbing. It must have been a while since she'd seen another person; her psyche was in pieces. It took Joseph several minutes to calm her down and get her to tell him what had happened. She explained that her name was Kyra and that she had been out doing some shopping with some friends of hers when some crazy people jumped one of her friends and bit him, tore chunks out of him. She and the rest of her friends ran as fast as they could to try and get away, but another group came out of nowhere and grabbed her other



friend and devoured her. She kept running, she didn't stop and she never looked back. There was probably nothing she could have done for the others anyway.

"When I stopped running, I found myself here at Trigger Happy. The man...the man you shot used to be the owner. He told me to come hide back here once we realized that some of them had followed me and he stayed up front to try and hold them back. I guess they bit him because he came back here and talked to me for a little while, telling me not to open this door no matter what...and then he just stopped talking. I don't know how long it was, but after a little while he started moaning...beating on the door. You saved my life."

The whole time she had been talking, Joseph had just been looking at her. She was a pretty girl, that was for sure. Long black hair and teal eyes that just seemed to go on forever. Kyra must've been an athlete of some kind because she was in almost as good a shape as most of the Marines he knew. She wore a simple grey hoodie that was torn in places, a pair of blue jeans and running shoes. Joseph nodded and stood, offering her a hand, then headed back toward the staircase. Lieutenant Jones and Corporal Montreal were waiting for him there.

"Upstairs is totally clear, Gunny; some weapons and ammo up here and a little bit of food. Maybe enough to last a small family of three or four a week." Derrik said, then glanced over at Kyra. "Who's she?"

"A survivor. Her name is Kyra. She's not infected; I checked her for wounds already." That was a partial truth. There was no blood on her clothing, so she probably wasn't infected. "Well, Lieutenant, what do you think?"

"She's pretty." said Jones.

Joseph shook his head. "Not the girl, El-Tee. Stop thinking with your dick."

The Lieutenant took a minute to tear his eyes away from the girl and respond. "Well, it looks like we can stay here for a while. We'll have to barricade that front door. It looked like the owner lived here; there's a couple bedrooms upstairs, a kitchen, a living room and some other things. Four of us should be able to stay here comfortably."

Gunny noddred. "Alright." It seemed like a sound idea to stay here, but something in the back of Joseph's mind told him that something bad was about to go down. He cringed at the thought.

#### 4. Boredom

High Ground: Windhover

A/N: After a short today, the Gunny is back! Yeah, this is a short chapter...but it's light-hearted and a little something I had fun writing. Hope you enjoy.

Chapter Four:

## Boredom

The first night in Trigger Happy had passed without incident. The three Helljumpers had finally managed to get Kyra to fall asleep and were sitting in the kitchen nearby, drinking beer and not saying much of anything. A feeling of despair had washed over everyone, and morale was sinking at what Joseph felt to be a record-breaking pace. They'd been watching the news and it seemed as though the situation was spiralling out of control...and then the news channels all went off the air. That was most definitely a bad omen, but Joseph tried to keep spirits up; they were going to survive, they were going to make it out of there...no matter what. All four of them...at least, that's what he kept telling himself and Jones and Montreal. And so, the three men drank, quietly shared stories and a good laugh or two in between. After Kyra woke up, Joseph left Derrick and Jones to the impromptu arm-wrestling competition they decided to have and sat down beside her on the previous owner's couch. She looked much, much better than before; the bags were gone from under her eyes, and they were no longer bloodshot from exhaustion. After a few moments, she turned to face the Gunny and managed a small smile.

"Sergeant Windhover-"

Windhover cut her off. "Please, call me Joseph. Rank doesn't seem to be too important right now." She nodded.

"Well, Joseph...I wanted to thank you again."

He smiled softly and patted the girl on the shoulder. "No need to thank me, Kyra; honestly. Now, do you know how to use one of these?"

Joseph offered her a civilian issued pistol he had retrieved from the shop downstairs. It was a small caliber weapon, only nine millimeter, but would probably be effective enough at dispatching the undead. Kyra nodded and accepted the weapon. She began looking it over, searching for the weapon's safety and clip release mechanisms, found those rather quickly and slipped it into the front of the waist of her pants. Gunny then handed her a few clips of ammunition that he'd loaded himself and she slipped those away in various pockets on her hoodie and her jeans. She smiled up at him at first, then cocked her head to the side. For a moment, Kyra just sort of...watched Joseph and he just sort of...watched her right back. This went on for a few awkward minutes before Kyra spoke.

"I don't know a lot about you," she said, then gestured to the other two men, "or them. So...tell me."

Her comment caught Joseph a bit off guard; that wasn't exactly what he was expecting to hear, but he quickly regained his composure and nodded slowly. He cast a sideways glance at his two friends, who were still in their heated arm wrestling competition and glaring at one another like they were mortal enemies, and then focused back on Kyra. Joseph exhaled a breath and slouched on the couch a bit as he scratched his head, trying to figure out where to start. What better than to do what he knew best? Himself. That's where Joseph Adam Windhover would begin.

"Well," he started, "I'm Joseph Windhover. My friends call me Joe or

Joey. I joined the Corps when I was seventeen- Jesus!" he exclaimed, rubbing his face. The other three survivors looked up at the Gunny with questioning expressions. "I'm fuckin' thirty years old! Christ in Heaven, I'm ancient." Joseph let out an exasperated sigh at his own age and the others laughed at him as he shook his head. Had it really been thirteen years since he'd joined the Corps? Thirteen years of fighting and killing and near misses? Thirteen years of his life...gone? Just like that, too. Poof. "Agh, anyway. I was born on Mars, raised there too. I've seen action on about twenty different planets and have collected about a hundred different scars. Won about half a dozen purple hearts and a Bronze Star."

Kyra whistled softly. "How'd you wind up on a shithole like this?"

Joseph smiled softly and cleared his throat. "Well, I uh...kinda slept with my CO's daughter. I, er, was a little drunk." he admitted with a sheepish shrug. "So...I wound up here." Kyra simply laughed softly, covering her mouth with a slender hand to try and muffle the noise.

"Wh-what about those two?" she asked, nodding over toward the other two Marines who had gone from arm wrestling to...swapping licks. Derrick stood sideways, feet spread far apart, with his sleeve rolled up. Jones grinned, rared back and punched Derrick's arm with all his might. The result was a rather loud 'smack' and large red spot on the Corporal's arm that would probably bruise rather handsomely. After that, Jones rolled up his sleeve and assumed the same posture that Corporal Montreal had been standing in before as he wound up to throw a punch. Joseph sighed softly and shook his head; those two were always competing about something. Accuracy down at the range, how many girls they could score, how fast they could run...they were like kids! Another sigh later, Joseph turned back to Kyra.

"That shithead," he said, gesturing to Montreal who had just punched Jones rather hard, "is Derrick Montreal. He's been in my unit for about eight months now. You've been in the Corps for, what, three years, Dee?" Derrick nodded as Jones punched him right in the same spot he had beforehand. "So that puts him at about twenty two. He was born out on one of the rim-worlds...I forget which one...and joined up right after the Covies glassed the ever-living crap out of it. Apparently, he and his folks got aboard the last Pelican out and he joined up right after his feet touched the deck of the cruiser that picked them up. He's been around the block a couple times, too. Two purple hearts, Distinguished Service Medal...good guy." There was another loud smack as Derrick punched Jones in the arm. Hard. This time, Jones gave a shout of "Son of a bitch, that fucking hurts!" and Derrick laughed at him, calling him a wuss among other names.

"Will you two fuckasses knock that shit off? It's annoying!"

"What's the matter Gunny?" asked Montreal as Jones vigorously rubbed his sore arm. "You want in?"

Joseph grunted indignantly and shook his head. Derrick simply shrugged and punched the El-Tee again for kicks, who shot a glare at the Corporal that was so fierce, Windhover was surprised the other man didn't simply disintegrate. After a tense moment, the two men sat back down at the dinner table and Montreal started to fold a piece of paper he'd pulled from his pocket into a small triangle. Paper

football. With a shake of his head, Joseph turned his attention back to Kyra.

"Anyway, Jones there is a bit of a mystery. His first name's Marcus, I know that much...but apparently he's fresh out of college. We've only known him a couple weeks. From what I've seen, his record is pretty spotless; thirtieth in his class in college. Apparently the brass figure they had enough bullet sponges out there in the field, so they assigned him here for his first duty. Guess they never counted on this shit, huh?" Joseph cast a glance over at the other two; Derrick had his thumb and index fingers on both hands set up like a field goal, and Jones was holding the tip of the triangular football with his left index finger. He bit down on his tongue and flicked. The little triangle flew through the air, in between Derrick's fingers and smacked him straight in the face. Jones immediately started laughing when Montreal recoiled slightly from the rather miniscule impact of the piece of paper. Gunny rolled his eyes and shook his head, then glanced over to Kyra...who was staring up at the tiled ceiling.

"Err...what are you doing?" he asked, utterly confused.

"Counting." she responded matter-of-factly.

"Counting what?"

"The tiles."

Joseph's jaw dropped and he shook his head very, very slowly. He quietly prayed to God that they would be able to get out of here and get out soon...otherwise, all of them were going to go batshit crazy.

## 5. Fight or Flight

A/N: Whew! Been a while hasn't it? At Obsidian Thirteen's behest, I've begun active writing on this little ditty once again. But, really, it needs to be finishedâ€|because, by God, I've got to complete at least one thing around here, right? Wellâ€|let's see what I've still got.

### Chapter Five:

#### Change of Plans

Joseph bolted up from his fitful sleep, his body drenched in a cold sweat. What the hell had he just heard? It sounded like a trash can getting knocked overâ€|that couldn't be good. At all. Cursing under his breath, he eased over Kyra's sleeping form and tried not to wake her. She'd fallen asleep shortly before the Gunnery Sergeant had, her body right up against his. He didn't think he would have been able to get up to sleep somewhere else before waking her, so he just fell asleep with her against him. Not that he would complain about it. He quietly toed his way over to the table where he'd left his equipment and slid his sidearm from its holster. For a moment, he hesitated; should he wake someone up? Bring someone with him?

No, he decided after a moment; it was probably nothing. He was probably just hearing thingsâ€|at least, that's what Joseph hoped. He

eased his way over to the door that lead downstairs and slowly opened it. The Gunny flicked on the flashlight attached to the barrel of his pistol and created a narrow beam of light that illuminated the narrow, almost claustrophobic stairs that led to the shop's first floor. One step at a time. That's how he worked downward. One step at a time with as little noise as possible. His breath escaped with a low, steady sound as he swept the flashlight back and forth at the bottom of the stair case. Nothing. Dried blood from earlierâ€¦a few bloody footprints from earlier as well, but there was nothing. Not here, anyway. Now convinced that his immediate area was clear, Joseph pressed onward to the front of the shop and carefully reached forward with a shaking hand.

Flesh met steel as his fingers clasped around the round handle and he twisted it. The bolt that held the door shut sounded like a sniper rifle going off in his ear in the eerie quiet of the city night. The ODSF flinched at the sound as though he expected every single undead within a hundred miles to come screaming their way, thirsting for blood and hungering for human flesh. He waited like that for a moment, shoulders hunched up around his ears, face frozen in a grimace. Then, he regained his senses and pushed the door open slowly, shining the flash light along the door's arc as it opened. Againâ€¦there was nothing. Gunnery Sergeant Windhover blew out a sigh of relief, but continued checking the store. He checked every corner, every inch, every cubby hole and dark corner that was possible to hide inâ€¦and all of it was clear. Maybe he had been hearing things after all.

Then, suddenly, there was another crash outside. Windhover whirled about, facing the front door of the shop, and killed the flashlight. He immediately crouched behind the front desk and peered out through the display. A stream of quiet curses flowed from his lips; outside were at least three or four of the damn dead things. Even if the zombies didn't know Joseph and the others were in Trigger Happy, there was still a risk that more would follow the noise they were makingâ€¦and accumulateâ€¦and then the four of them would have a real problem on their hands. Still cursing, Joseph quietly slipped out of the front room, closed and locked the doors, then bolted upstairs to rouse the others; this place wasn't safe anymore. The Gunny crouched in front of Kyra and shook her shoulder lightly.

"Kyra," he whispered softly, giving her another firm shake, "Kyra wake up. We've gotta go. Get your pistol while I wake the guys." As she roused from her sleep, Joseph all-but kicked in the door to the room the other two men were staying in, causing them to both jump on the floor and bed they occupied. "Get up. There's some of those things outside. Get your shit; we're leaving." Jones and Montreal immediately scrambled to their feet in a blur of motion and bolted out into the main room, pulling on their gear in the process. Kyra, Joseph noticed, was now wide awake and sitting on the edge of the couch, watching the three men get their gear together. Unlike before, she now looked calmâ€¦collectedâ€¦ready. Joseph gave her a pat on the shoulder, and she returned a soft smile.

"Alright, Gunnyâ€¦what's the plan? Where we going?" Derek whispered, as if he were afraid speaking normally would attract the attention of the undead outside. Jones and Kyra were also silently asking the same question; their expressions said it all.

Joseph frowned; he hadn't thought about where they'd go or what they'd do. For a moment, his eyes dropped to the floor as he thought. They'd have to get out of the city somehow—the Warthog? It was only a block away—but traveling to it would be perilous, especially now with the creatures stumbling around out front and just generally causing a ruckus. One of the civilian cars outside would have been an equally appealing mode of transportation, but Joseph struck that thought down as soon as it entered his head. The chances of a car alarm going off were just too great. He wanted to make as little noise as possible. Going on foot was a third alternative, but they'd have no way to make a quick escape if they found themselves in a tight spot. Damn. Looked like the Warthog was the only way to go now. Joseph gave a nod.

"Alright—here's the plan. There's just a few of those things out front—shouldn't be anything we can't handle. Derek, you take point, buddy. El-Tee, you'll be right behind him." He then turned his gaze to the civilian among the group. "Kyra, you're attached to my hip. Stay close to me and you should be alright."

The two men nodded, drew their side arms and made their way down the stairway, each covering his own sector of fire. Derek pushed open the door that led to the front area of the store as Kyra and Joseph made it to the bottom landing of the stairs and immediately followed. Windhover instructed Kyra to stay behind the register and joined Derek and Jones at the front door. The two men nodded, and Joseph raised his booted foot and slammed it against the door, causing it to spring open. He charged out and planted a round right between the eyes of the nearest zombie. In a flash, the other two men were out and firing. The poor saps that had become zombies and chosen to wander this particular street didn't even stand a chance; the four of them were brought down in a hail of white-hot lead in less than two seconds. Derek and Jones began securing the immediate area, visible only by the cones of light emitted by their flashlights, as Joseph ducked back inside to wave Kyra out of her hiding place.

The two of them met up with Joseph's squad mates outside and continued down the sidewalk. Kyra tugged on his sleeve and whispered 'I think I knew them' as they ran, to which Joseph could only reply with an apologetic look that was hidden by his face and a shrug of his shoulders. Resistance was light, with only a few of the meandering undead staggering about on the streets. Windhover could feel his spirits, his hopes, and the hopes of the others rising as they drew nearer and nearer to where the three men had left the Warthog. They could leave—they could finally escape this hellish nightmare. Finally, as they rounded the corner and expected to see the method of their salvation, the four survivors realized that the real nightmare had just begun.

The warthog was gone.

End  
file.